CHRISTIAN DRAMA

edited by
JOHN HESTER

cover designed by JOHN PIPER

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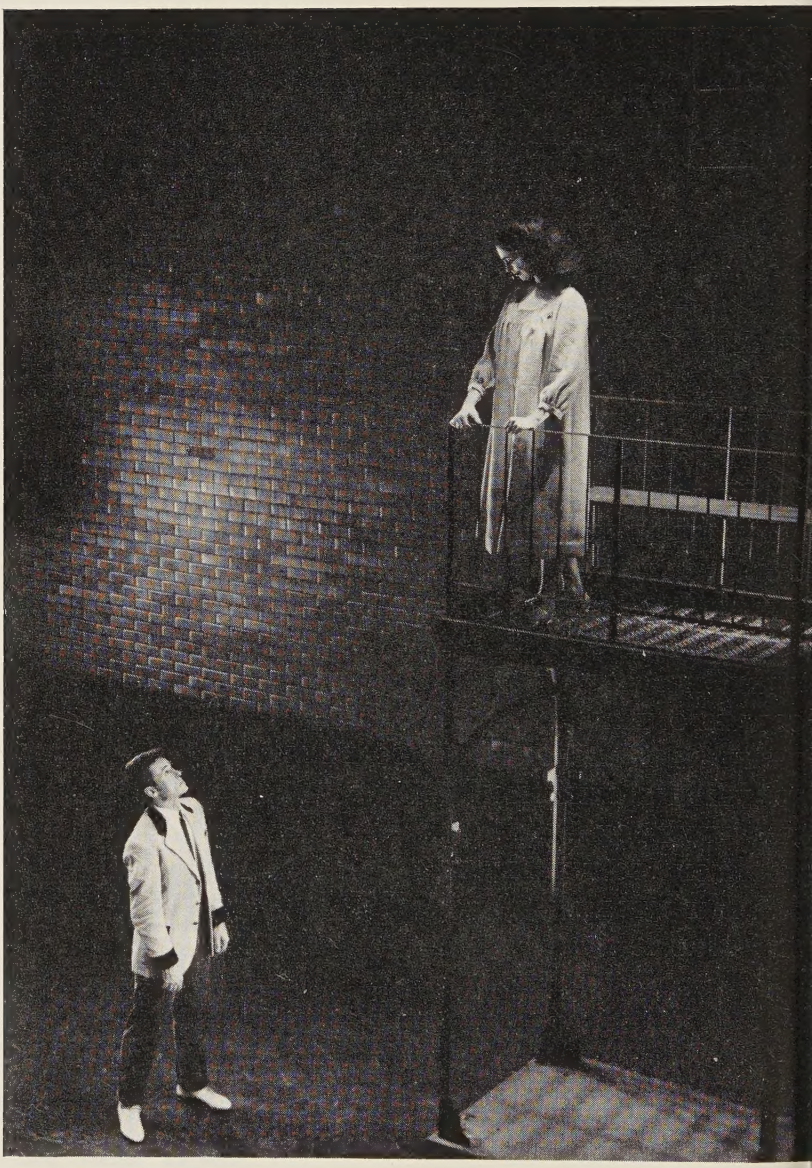
All opinions expressed in these pages are personal, and are not necessarily those of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain

Vol. 3 Number ~~10~~ 12 **Spring, 1959**

Published by:
THE RELIGIOUS DRAMA SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN
166 SHAFTESBURY AVENUE, LONDON, W.C.2
Telephone: COVent Garden 3304/5

CHRISTIAN DRAMA: 6/6 per annum (post free)



(*Photo by Angus McBe*

THE BALCONY SCENE FROM *WEST SIDE STORY*

EDITORIAL

Surely no problem challenges the modern playwright as does that of communication, how to say what he wants to say in words his audience will understand, at once and through a theatrical experience. For a play is not intended primarily to be read and re-read, but to be acted and seen, and it stands or falls by its ability to succeed at one performance. For a writer to plead, " oh, but you must see it again and read it," is for him to admit failure. The problem is not only one of ideas, but also of the choice of theatrical media in general; increasingly the modern public is responding to an appeal to its visual senses, is seeing more and listening to words correspondingly less.

The solution of this problem is for no one more difficult or more urgent than for the writer of religious drama. The days are gone when he could expect the majority of his audience to pick up the religious significance of his work, to know the language of religion and its allied subjects. Now the indirect approach is almost invariably the rule, with the religious writer assuming that his audience knows virtually nothing. It is difficult to see how it can become otherwise before the reconversion of our country.

The religious dramatist has been quick to try to adapt himself to meet this new ignorance, but he has been slower to recognize and use the theatrical media of the day. What would appear to be most badly needed is a collaboration of Christian artists in the production of a work of the calibre of *West Side Story*, but setting out specifically Christian reactions to circumstances and above all stating firmly the great fact of Christian hope. The poetry of sound, movement and colour/design (music, dancing, décor) would support the creator's exposition (in terms that would at the same time entertain!) of the basic truths upon which our lives are built. From whose minds and pens such a work is to come, alas I do not know: but I am certain that no one is more urgently needed in the whole world of contemporary drama.

YOU WANT NEW PLAYS?

By R. H. WARD

Mr. Ward laid the following suggestions before the Annual General Meeting of the Religious Drama Society of Gt. Britain. They are here offered to a wider public for its consideration.

There are two practical incentives to younger and more or less untried dramatists: (1) the chance of earning even a small amount of money (on which to live for a time and write another play); and (2) the chance of performance (by which to learn now to write a better play next time). Nothing is more discouraging than the feeling that the effort (and possibly sacrifice) involved in writing a play may come to nothing, either by way of a living or by way of performance: few dramatists have the hardihood to write what is unlikely ever to " communicate " with an audience, or result in anything more than yet another script collecting dust on a shelf.

I suggest that the two necessary incentives might be provided through the Society in the following ways:

1. Money. There must be many young dramatists who feel that it would be worth while to undertake the writing of a play for a small assured sum —e.g. £50—and there must be many interested members of R.D.S. who would be prepared to club together (say, in the sum of £5 each) to encourage a dramatist in this position. A dramatist could be selected for such a " commission " either on the basis of promising work already known to the R.D.S. office, or even by interview as a result of advertisement or inquiry on the part of the office. A selected dramatist could then meet his sponsors. I believe he would feel much encouraged by the feeling that they had a real interest in his work (though their sponsorship should hamper him with no " conditions "), by the fact that he would gain something towards his living, and by the fact that his play might also qualify for

2. Performance (though this incentive could also be available to dramatists who had no need of the first). There must be either affiliated R.D.S. groups, or individual members prepared to form an *ad hoc* group for the purpose, who would undertake to perform a new play by a dramatist recommended to them by the R.D.S. office. It is a help to many dramatists to have to write to a particular group's requirements (of casting, setting, etc.), and to discuss his play with the group before he writes it or while he is doing so.

Incentives (1) and (2) could of course be the dual responsibility of a single group towards a dramatist.

There is an obvious risk involved in both (1) and (2). A dramatist cannot (without disastrous results) be told what to write, nor can he be made to write an actable play, even if he has been paid for it and/or promised a production. Those who clubbed together to commission a dramatist might lose their money, and a group which has spent time and effort on discussing, and perhaps even rehearsing, a play which had finally to be abandoned might lose their time and effort. But the chances are that more gain than loss would result from such a scheme. Dramatists would gain by the realisation that their work was wanted and by valuable experience; acting groups would gain by the added interest involved in doing a play which was new, and perhaps specially written for them; and R.D.S. as a whole would gain by the addition to their script library of useful plays already tried in performance.

IS THAT PLAY CHRISTIAN?

By TOM F. DRIVER

No questions are put to me more frequently than these: What is a Christian play? Is such and such a play Christian?

The answer to the first question is never simple and the second can be answered " yes " or " no " only in the minority of cases. A play is not likely to be simply Christian or not. It is likely to be near to it in some respects and further from it in others. Its Christianity is likely to be as difficult of assessment as that of persons about whom we might ask similar questions.

The task of Christian discrimination (to use Brother George Every's phrase) requires flexibility. One needs not the ability to tell black from white but the patience to distinguish qualities which differ in subtle and often complex ways. The useful question is usually not, " Is this play Christian? " but, " In what particular way does this play reflect a Christian understanding, and in what ways does it reflect something else? " The answer to such a question may be of help in deciding how a particular play may be of value to us in the task of interpreting to the church and to the world the various facets of the Christian understanding of man.

A given play is built upon assumptions about the nature of man, the nature of his world, and the nature of the action in which he may be involved. The assumptions vary from theatre to theatre and from play to play. Is it possible to compile a list of the requisite understandings of man, world, and action which an " ideal Christian play " would have, so that in determining which of these understandings were or were not present in a given play, one might determine how near it came to reflecting the Christian view? In spite of the difficulties of such a task, I would like to try it, in the hope that the results, however tentative, might be enlightening.

The following six criteria are set down in order from the more general to the more specifically Christian. The later ones in the list pre-suppose the presence of the earlier ones.

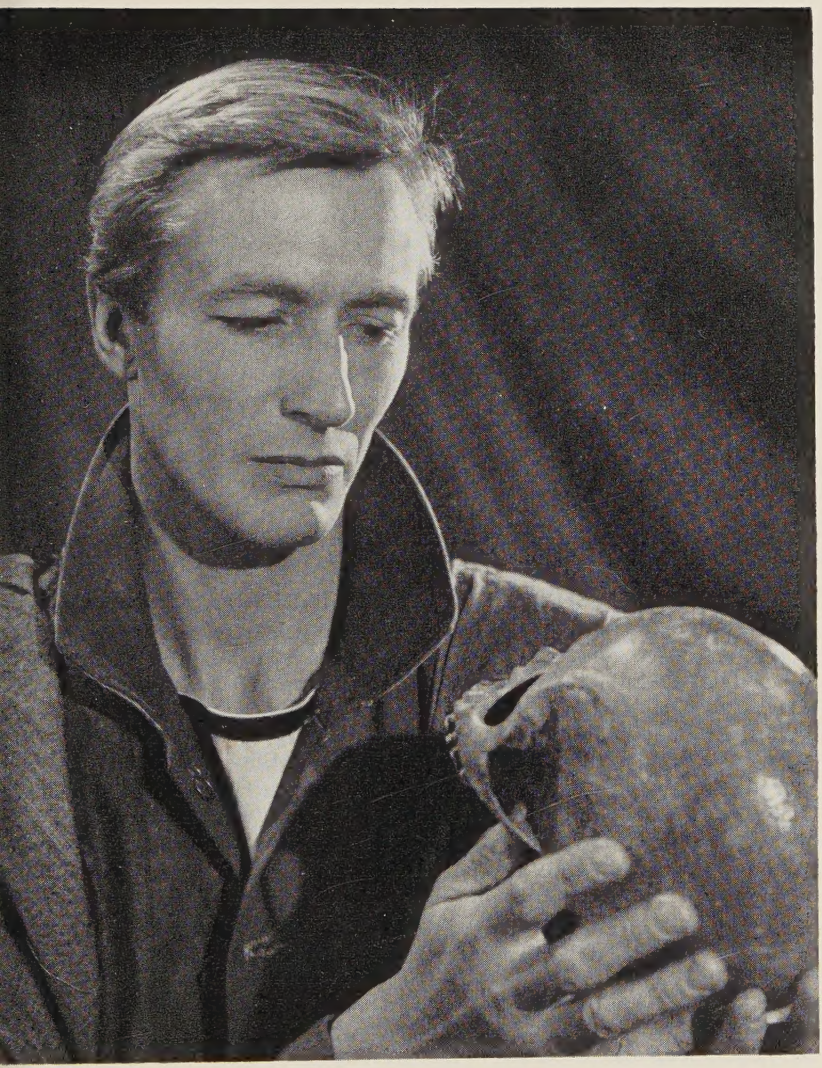
1. Human responsibility. The word " responsibility " is here used in its root meaning, " having the capacity to respond ". Implied also is the ability to respond in some measure of freedom. The question of human freedom poses a knotty philosophical problem, which fortunately the dramatist is not called upon to solve. He may depict man as responsible for his own actions, even as he depicts him enmeshed in fate or necessity also. The idea of fate is detrimental to the idea of freedom only when it makes for itself exclusive claims. We are, however, able to call Macbeth responsible even at the same time as we may say he is in the hands of malign fate, and the same is true of Oedipus.

The modern theatre has two ways of robbing man of responsibility. In the late plays of Eugene O'Neill fate or necessity (explained in various ways) is made responsible for all that is significant. Human responsibility is not denied. It is simply made to be of little importance. Modern naturalism, whether of the sociological sort (e.g. *Dead End*) or the psychological (e.g. *A Clearing in the Woods*), sloughs off responsibility by making the situation of man the result of various natural forces.

2. Objective meaningfulness of human responses. It is possible to portray man as capable of choice but to deny his choices' significance by saying that their meaning is entirely subjective, or that they have no meaning at all. A Christian understanding, on the other hand, would have to insist that man's choices are objectively meaningful, that is, they are made in a world in which good and evil are real. Ibsen's *Ghosts*, *An Enemy of the People* and Hebbel's *Maria Magdalena* come to mind as plays in which choice is meaningful because of the reality of good and evil.

3. A world in which time and history are important. The particular nature of the Christian revelation is such that God's dealings with man are thought of as taking place within the realm of unique, decisive, and time-bound events in human history. Man is therefore understood as an historical being. " It makes no difference to a fox," says Reinhold Niebuhr, " whether he lives in the first century or the twentieth. But to a man it is decisive." This means that the responses man makes, and the objective meaningfulness of those responses, are understood within the realm of historical particularity. Man is not choosing a timeless and eternal good or evil, he is choosing (or refusing) something which is demanded of him, and perhaps him only, in his particular, and perhaps his utterly unique, situation. This is the case of *Hamlet*, and perhaps it is because *Hamlet* in this way so thoroughly represents the western Christian understanding of historical man that we find it of such abiding interest. To take a contrary case, here lies the deficiency which the Christian understanding must find in the works of Thornton Wilder. Malcolm Cowley rightly called Wilder " the man who abolished time ". In Wilder's view, one place is much like another, and one century the same as the next. What does it matter whether Mr. Antrobus lives in Plainfield, New Jersey, or in an ancient cliff dwelling? He is the same from age to age, and he perpetually adapts himself to life's necessities in much the same way. In such a view, the God of historical revelation and His creature, the man who lives in a world of historical change, are quite out of place.

4. A world in which redemption is both necessary and possible. The Biblical story of the Fall implies that, even though man is responsible for his actions, something is also wrong with the world, nature, and society in which he lives. Both man and his world are in need of restoration to an " original " harmony and righteousness. The dramatist also, both in tragedy and in comedy, portrays some wrongness in society (and perhaps in the universe) which needs putting right. Such wrongness is the basis of dramatic conflict. Most dramatists thus imply, at least, the necessity of some kind of redemption. But they do not always imply that such redemption is possible. Friedrich Duerenmatt's *The Visit*, for instance, makes us shudder from the vision of a corrupted society, and apparently an entire world ruled by vengeance combined with money. It is an open question, however, whether the redemption so obviously necessary might actually come about. The play's few speeches about grace and forgiveness are largely lost in the rush of events, and one is left with a world in which there is indeed human responsibility, the reality of good and evil, genuine historical existence, and the necessity for redemption, but no assurance that what is so necessary is at all possible. Herein lies the greatness and at the same time, from a Christian point of view, the limitation of Mr. Duerenmatt's play.



(*Angus McBean*)

(*By permission of the Old Vic*)

JOHN NEVILLE AS HAMLET

5. A world in which redemption is affected through love. It is at this point that a playwright such as George Bernard Shaw leaves our procession. George Bernard Shaw fulfils the first four requirements (although there might be some question about the reality of evil in his plays), but he does not appear to have agreed that love is essential to redemption. He seems to have put his hopes on the development of the intellect and the conscience. The world is not ready to receive the saints, such as Joan, because it is not yet mature enough, because its intellect is too young, its sense of morality too immature. Given enough time, as in *Back to Methusaleh*, man's brain and his conscience would develop to the point where his total life would be set right. The Christian sensitivity must feel it ironic that one as astute as Shaw could be so naive in regard to the nature of man. For the Christian insight is that the flaw in man is located not primarily in his intellect nor in his conscience, but in the freedom of his heart, where his love, which rightly would turn toward God and the neighbour, in fact turns perversely toward himself. The Christian understanding sees the source of human redemption in an action of love, a self-sacrifice made by the God who is Love, directed toward reclaiming the love which is due to God from the self which is man. The theatre, ancient and modern, is full of plays in which redemption comes about through love. *The Winter's Tale*, *Peer Gynt*, and *Tea and Sympathy* are disparate examples. But few such plays meet the last of our six criteria.

6. A world in which the event of Jesus as the Christ is central both to man's historical existence and to that love which is the agent of redemption. One pre-supposes here an acknowledgement of the sovereignty of God, without which Jesus cannot be called the Christ. The touchstone of the genuinely Christian play is acknowledgement that the Christ is central to the interpretation of history and to the reclamation of the true loves of man. We find here only the specifically Christian playwrights (Eliot, Charles Williams, Claudel, Rutenborn, etc. in the modern theatre). Here is the stumbling block beyond which the secular writers, however great their insights, however valuable and however deserving of applause their work may be, cannot go.

The danger of putting forth such an outline as the one given here is great. I must close by warning the reader. The list says nothing at all about specifically dramatic or theatrical values. It is therefore of very little use in dramatic criticism. The list does not help us to judge the depth of a playwright's penetration into the existential predicaments of man. It does not tell us why we might, as a matter of practical value and common sense, prefer the work of Tennessee Williams to that of dozens of " Christian playwrights " who could leap over these six hurdles with ease. The list is useful, if at all, only in the task of determining what intellectual qualities a given play has which move it nearer to the Christian reading of life and what qualities separate it from the Christian view. It is thus a sort of doctrinal formulation. We must remember that, although doctrine has been indispensable to the Church, doctrine has never completely encompassed the Church's concern with life. With doctrine, we judge the cultural forms of the world, one of which is theatre. But the cultural forms of the world also judge our doctrine. We must therefore continue to think, but to think with caution, and with love.

GETTING IT ACROSS

By AMY CRANK

" Speaking to the ' ordinary chap ' " was the headline of a *Manchester Guardian* report of Miss Pamela Keily's present work with particular reference to the new play by James Brabazon, *The Trial of Jimmy Brown*. And there can be no doubt for anyone who has sat in an " ordinary " audience that within these terms of reference *Jimmy Brown* is a quite overwhelming success. The mediaeval *Everyman* from which it frankly derives is supreme Christian propaganda with a challenge both rational and emotional which is only equalled by Pascal's Wager. With the barriers of mediaeval symbolism and language broken down by Mr. Brabazon, the message reaches a modern working-class audience, if one dare not say with the impact of the original, then at any rate with a challenge which still evades much religious drama.

Jimmy Brown, faced by a heavenly messenger (wearing a light-coloured lounge suit) when he has just narrowly escaped being knocked down by a 'bus, is told that he will die of thrombosis at six o'clock that evening. He appeals for help to those two great props of twentieth-century Man, the all-powerful press and the family doctor, then less hopefully to the parson, his friends in the pub and finally to his wife, Ethel. For much of the early part of the play, Mr. Brabazon contents himself with paralleling his original but avoiding the symbolism and giving an essentially modern flavour by the scenes with the newspaper editor and the doctor. But throughout these early fast-moving scenes, one is, of course, wondering how the author will solve the problem which faces any attempt to modernise a mediaeval religious play and which is posed by the great gulf between an age of faith and one of scepticism or apathy. In my opinion Mr. Brabazon solves the problem admirably. The mediaeval play, it will be remembered, has a mounting tide of anguish which reaches its climax with Everyman's cry,

" Thus may I well myself hate,"

followed later by confession, the peace of reconciliation and the calm descent to Death. Mr. Brabazon cannot follow this pattern and remain true to the twentieth century. So the scene with the parson is a scene of incompatibles with Jimmy Brown concerned to have a testimonial to say that he is a decent, clean-living chap and the parson talking of sin and repentance. And it is not until after death in a memorable scene with the angel that Jimmy Brown has the first inklings of wanting to " apologise " to God and recognises that he has nothing to bring to Him, and so Jimmy and the angel are enabled to set out on their long journey. This late climax solves the problem of modernisation excellently but it inevitably leads to a slight sense of unbalance for we necessarily see far more of the defiant, unrepentant Jimmy than we do of him penitent.

The Trial of Jimmy Brown is, like its source, a propaganda play and in order to reach a particular audience, the author has stripped his play of all that might keep its message from them. But by so doing he remains true to the attitudes and pretences of our age. In this twentieth-century " Everyman ", there are no depths of anguish, no sense of sin, no sense of the numinous. Instead, we have all the back-chat, the defiance, the cheekiness of modern Man when he is faced with the thought of the Absolute, as well as

(Continued on page 23)

LONDON THEATRE

By JOHN HESTER

When the history of the theatre of our time is written, there will be no more characteristic phenomenon to be considered than that of the " music drama ". The era which died with Ivor Novello has been succeeded by one which has so far borne such works as *Expresso Bongo*, *Irma la Douce*, and *West Side Story*. The closing moments of *King's Rhapsody*, a forlorn rose weeping for itself upon the stage, have been blasted away by the violences of a new world. Love, the greatest testing ground of human experience, is no longer represented as a languid and playful idyll; it is now shown as hurting and close to death, held always in violent tension with the surging forces of sin and licked for only fleeting moments by nervous tongues of romance. There are of course many who will lament this passing of an age, those who go to the theatre primarily as an escape, to tread a life of springing turf which they voluntarily accept for three hours as true. These will not welcome a contemporary theatre which holds a boldly truthful mirror up to nature as it is.

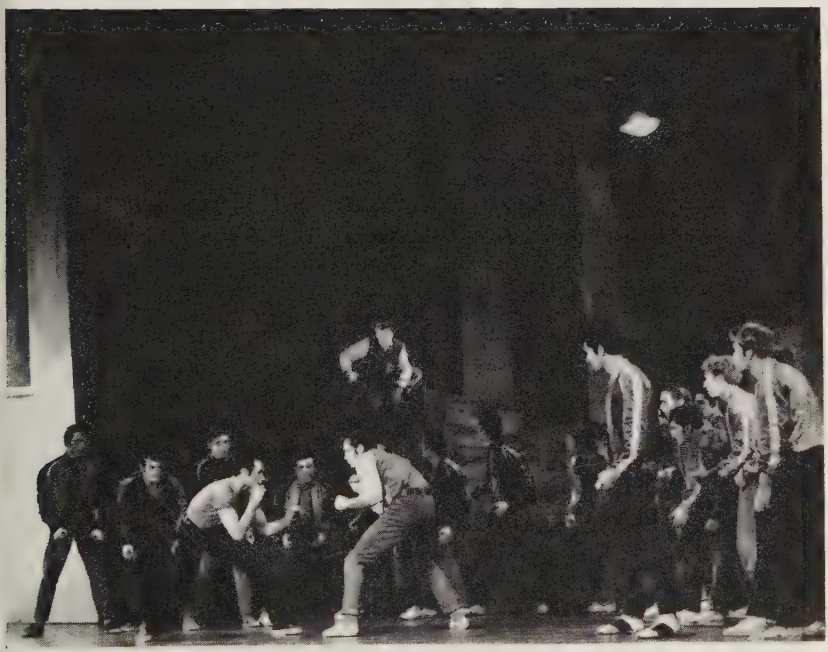
But for the present writer there is only grateful excitement in all this, for the theatre appears to be coming near to the basic purpose for which it exists —surely not only to entertain, but to reflect through observation of human character the fundamental truths which govern our lives.

The perfection of theatrical technique which I noted last time in Mr. Tennessee Williams' *Garden District* has now been outdone by the incorporation of dancing and music into the pattern, and the result is the miracle of *West Side Story* (Her Majesty's, December 12th)—a miracle of collaboration between composer, choreographer, authors, designers, cast and production unit. Retelling in modern idiom the story of Romeo and Juliet, perhaps the greatest lesson we learn from it is that the more things change the more they remain the same. For the diseases of our age which are the concern of *West Side Story*, the problems of " colour " and of " youth ", are in derivation no different from those which have racked the human race since the fall of Adam, a period which embraces the desperate days of family strife in sixteenth-century Verona! The coke-drinking hoodlums of " Gee, Officer Krupke " are close relatives of the Bongo kids, the Montague-Capulet gangsters, and Cain and Abel. They are the very ones whom God has mysteriously transfigured by His Incarnation and redeemed by the Cross. They are in fact ourselves.

Names of people concerned in the production of *West Side Story* seem strangely out of place unless one is to mention the entire list of artists and technicians; yet it would be improper to pass on without noting that the brilliant score is by Mr. Leonard Bernstein, and the Producer and Choreographer are both Mr. Jerome Robbins.

Three other plays in London have recently presented for our judgment different aspects of the colour problem without showing the mass conflict actually in flame upon the stage as does *West Side Story*. It is the fact that herebaby will be black which strikes home with the greatest force in Miss Shlagh Delaney's remarkable first play, *A Taste of Honey*, produced by Miss Joan Littlewood for Theatre Workshop at Wyndhams on February 10th,

after previous presentation at the company's own theatre down in Stratford. The background setting of our English colour problem, conditions at home in the West Indies, was shown us by Mr. Errol John in *Moon on a Rainbow Shawl* at the Royal Court on December 4th. He was concerned with individuals (an aspect which one tends to overlook when one considers something like " the colour problem " in the abstract), and succeeded in showing us that the immigrants who come here so optimistically from across the Atlantic are people with faults and failings pretty much like our own. Mr. Ted Willis, in the best of the ' colour ' plays—*Hot Summer Night*, New Theatre, November 26th—asks our judgment on the actual issue, " What would *you* do if your daughter wanted to marry a man with a differently



(*Photo by Angus McBane*

WEST SIDE STORY: SHARKS *v.* JETS

pigmented skin? " He gives us no easy answer, thank goodness, though by the resolution of his play he gives us a hint of what he himself would presumably do, allow the two young people to go ahead but realising the enormity of the hazards which threaten. This is surely the Christian answer, for the devil of colour prejudice is in us all however strongly we may believe that all are one in Christ. Each of the characters in *Hot Summer Night* states a sincere position in which there is much truth—the girl knowing not only that she loves her man but also that he is a good man, and so seeing all criticism as the blindness of uncomprehending adults; her mother physically sickened by the very thought of mixed marriage; her father, a trade union leader famous for his defence of coloured men's rights, realising the odds

against his daughter's happiness yet determined to stand by her decision and at the same time to put his own marriage in order; his old father recalling from the past that there are always other fish in the sea; the coloured boy, trained by experience to hate all white women, discovering new prejudices to replace those dissolved by his true love. The actors in this piece were quite excellent, though Mr. Peter Cotes' production was too episodic, broken by use of lighting into fresh scenes with every entrance and exit, somewhat in the style of the classical French drama.

(*Angus McBean*) (*By permission of the Old Vic*)

FLORA ROBSON AS MRS. ALVING AND MICHAEL HORDERN AS PASTOR MANDERS IN IBSEN'S *GHOSTS* AT THE OLD VIC

French drama provided a delightful evening at the Old Vic on February 11th, when the excellent company presented Mr. Miles Malleson's lively adaptations of *Sganarelle* and *Tartuffe* in a double bill. The latter, which has good claim to be Molière's greatest play, was about as well done as an English company could hope to achieve, and the performances of Mr. Derek Francis and Mr. Gerald James stood up well to my memory of M. Louis Jouvet and M. Pierre Renoir in Paris. There is no more odious character on the stage than Tartuffe, and Christians should study him by obligation at least once

a year, and beware. . . .! On the other hand there can be no more delicious character on the stage to-day than that created by Dame Sybil Thorndike (almost alas from nothing) in Miss Clemence Dane's *Eighty in the Shade*, specially written for the golden wedding anniversary of Dame Sybil and Sir Lewis Casson, and produced at the Globe Theatre on January 8th. Never have such lines been so transfigured by the magic of voice and personality. She was for a short time delightfully offset by Miss Ann Walford, though the play was kind enough to none of the other excellent actors.

The most challenging thoughts this season have been squeezed through my mind by Dr. Salvato Cappelli's *The Devil Peter* (Arts Theatre, November 27th), a loosely constructed, infuriatingly unclear study of Peter Kurten, the so-called "Dusseldorf Monster", who terrorised that city by repeated killings in the 1920's. It questions how far the law, the "collective conscience" of the people, can judge a man's responsibility for his actions; how far these are overwhelmingly conditioned by those who have influenced him; above all, how shall we (and God?) judge a man who has lived a life of bestial criminality for which his responsibility is most probably diminished, yet who has at a crucial moment committed one great act of selfless love with undiminished responsibility?

The influences which destroy the wretched Oswald Alving in Ibsen's *Ghosts* (Old Vic, November 12th) are as near home as possible and are clearly stated; they are in his blood. Mr. John Fernald's production was startlingly full of laughter, which added powerfully to the melodrama as it drew to its shocking conclusion. Can it be that by some trick of time Ibsen had Miss Flora Robson in mind when he created the role of Mrs. Alving? Certainly the terrible dilemma of the woman who has struggled to preserve a noble public memory of a man whom she despised was a superb vehicle for that uniquely passionate acting of which Miss Robson is the mistress. The Old Vic's Pastor Manders (they seem through him and Tartuffe to have decided this season to strip something of the humbug from us Christians!)—Manders was well played by Mr. Michael Hordern, who gave however the performance of his life five weeks later as *Macbeth*. This closed with the most exciting fight I have ever seen, making one wonder how the company's casualty list can be as small as it is!

Finally back to Mr. Tennessee Williams, a licence for whose *The Rose Tattoo* we and Mr. Sam Wanamaker have awaited for six impatient years. It was at last performed in London at the New Theatre on January 15th. This beautifully written play tells of a passionate Sicilian woman in exile on the Gulf Coast of Florida. Her past joy she has entombed in an urn with her husband's ashes, but her future joy is not so encased and materialises in the shape of Alvaro Mangiacavallo, "her husband's body with the head of a clown". The play's greatest interest lies in the relation of this woman to her daughter, discovering love for the first time as her mother refinds it for the four thousand, three hundred and eighty-first time. Except for the unproducible children and old crones, and for the over-sustained level of Miss Lea Padovani's moving performance in the central role, Mr. Wanamaker's production was admirable, and contained the gem of his own interpretation of Alvaro. He is an actor with very few inhibitions and great command of whatever part he undertakes, and is one of the chief delights of the English stage.

PLAYS IN NEW YORK

THE MYSTERY OF THE FINDING OF THE CROSS

Reviewed by BROOKS ATKINSON

(Reprinted by permission of the New York Times.)

To-day and to-morrow the concluding performances will be given of a remarkable religious play that opened at the Union Theological Seminary last evening. It is Henri Ghéon's *The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross*, in an English translation by Frank de Jonge, and staged by E. Martin Browne and Henzie Raeburn.

M. Ghéon wrote the play in 1932 to commemorate the legendary finding of a twelfth-century cross in a field in Belgium. The cross has been in the care of the Benedictine monks who were hoping to build a monastery there.

The first and concluding acts are written in the form of classical Greek tragedy and chronicle the spiritual travail of Constantine, Emperor of Rome in the fourth century, and his mother, Helena. The second act consists of a ritual litany celebrating the passion of the Crucifixion.

The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross is obviously a work of high intellectual order and artistic intent. Since it is a formal drama, lacking the humility and innocence of the medieval mysteries, it would not have much value on the stage if it were not directed imaginatively.

Dr. and Mrs. Browne have long been recognised as the ablest people in this field. Since the actors are students in the Union Theological Seminary and therefore amateurs, the triumph of the staging is especially surprising. From the theatrical point of view, the play is static, especially the interior play entitled *The Way of the Cross*. But the directors have found ways to bring the play alive with significant movement and formalised speaking that keep the general tone in a high plane of meaning and evoke a religious feeling that has purity and dignity.

In substance, this is the story of how Helena and Constantine come to embrace Christianity. Horrified by the intrigues and murders of court life, Helena makes a pilgrimage to Jerusalem to seek the true cross, finds it and discovers miraculous properties in it. Although in history Constantine was characteristically repellent as one of the Roman emperors, he enjoys a certain prestige for having accepted Christianity, which he was shrewd enough to recognise as the coming thing.

M. Ghéon's drama is not a study of history, but a sacred mystery. Although it formalises Constantine's character, it does not misrepresent him; and the silent ceremony of his last-minute conversion and the concluding processional he leads down the aisle of the theatre are devout and impressive.

The character of Constantine is uncommonly well played by Philip Swander. His show of arrogance, his stylised movement capture the exact spirit of the play. As Helena, Lida-Virginia Parker is also admirable. Without violating style, she expresses personal sorrow and the religious questing of a woman of compassion.

As the spokesman for the chorus, Dr. Browne brings to his playing the formal manner and the selfless piety of a pivotal role. The only professional actor in the lot, he supports a section of the group acting that needs technical authority.

There are inevitably soft places in a performance acted by non-professionals. For it is impossible to learn the classical style during rehearsals. But the acting as a whole is remarkably effective. The use of voice, the measured movement, the sustaining of the impersonal mood are a considerable achievement.

The Mystery of the Finding of the Cross is the most ambitious project the Union Theological Seminary has undertaken in its current programme in religious drama. As literary art and as stagecraft it makes a notable contribution.

JB

Reviewed by LOUIS A. HASELMAYER

The current Broadway production of Archibald MacLeish's *JB* is an event of multiple significance. A verse drama based on *The Book of Job* by a distinguished American poet in a star-studded production under a leading American director is a fantastic occurrence. In spite of a complete newspaper strike, depriving the public of theatre reviews, the play is now sold out for months to come. Problems of cosmic evil, human suffering, man's guilt, God's providence posed in purely Biblical terms, dramatised in abstract symbolic forms, are thrown at an audience without the slightest apology. Unabashed theology is a commercial hit on Broadway.

MacLeish has given the Old Testament story a modern setting. Within the framework of a circus scene, two vendors, Mr. Zuss and Mr. Nickles, frustrated actors, decide to play the parts of God and Satan. What begins as a stunt merges into reality as the modern American family of JB appears on the scene. From this moment on, Zuss and Nickles loose their identities as vendors and become a double *deus ex machina*. In a series of deliberately abrupt, broken episodes, the children of JB suffer catastrophic, stupid deaths by airplane crash, automobile accident, rape by idiot, fire and collapsed walls. JB's wife leaves him in violent despair and he is afflicted with a skin disease. Comforters visit him with hollow hopes—vividly characterised through a communist worker, a broken down psychiatrist, a guilt-loving unfrocked parson. The resolution comes with JB's repentance and Sarah's return.

There is no doubt that two thirds of the play is thematically unified, well realised in dramatic form, beautifully written in poetry which skilfully incorporates Biblical material. Effective use is made of such theatrical devices as masks, loudspeakers, choruses and commentators. A quality of formal ritual gives dimension to the scope of the ideas and affords a brilliant contrast with the sharp realism of the story episodes.

There is also no doubt that director Elia Kazan has drawn from a perceptive reading of the text a bold, imaginative production. The personal suffering of JB evokes the mass suffering of humanity, the inexplicable nature of evil, the hard callousness of the casual world. The transcendence of the God-figure above human compassion or sentimentality and the bitter, rebellious cynicism of the Satan-figure are magnificently performed by Raymond Massey and Christopher Plummer.

What bothers both critic and theologian, for different reasons, is the conclusion. For the final section of the play is weak dramatically. Pat Hingle

as JB just does not penetrate any depths. What pity is elicited from the audience is the result of theatrical tricks of posture, studied pauses, lighting rather than a tragic catharsis emerging from the text itself. There is a straining for effect which is shared by both actors and audience, but it is never quite clear what this effect is supposed to be.

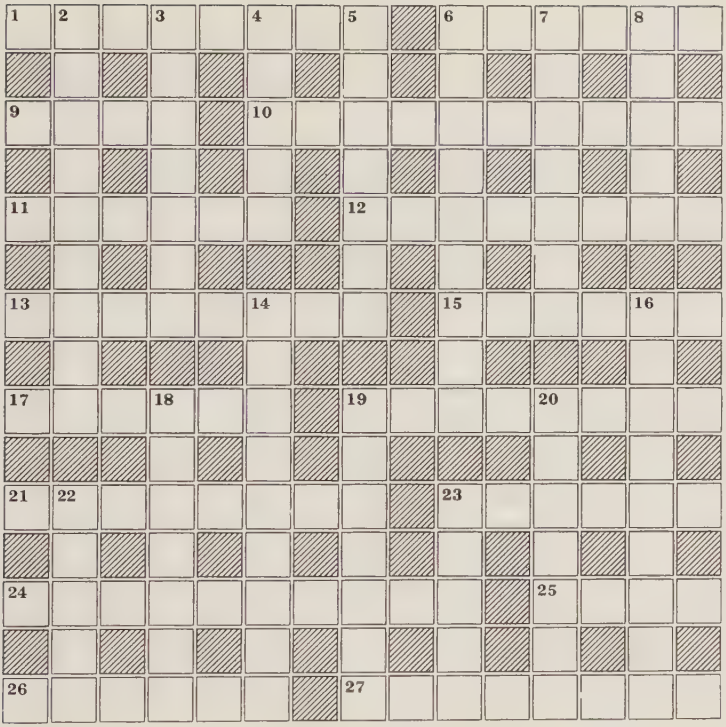
This dramatic weakness arises from MacLeish's failure to come to real grip with the question that he has posed with such boldness and force. Part of this problem is the source of the play itself. For *The Book of Job* offers two contradictory solutions. The first, contained in the folkloristic frame, is the theory that God permits human suffering to test the faith of man. This is clear-cut but basically unsatisfactory. The other, embodied in the poetic dialogues of Job and God, is the statement that man's demand for clear-cut answers is an evidence of human pride. Man cannot know certain things of cosmic truth. MacLeish plays with both ideas until the final scene when he suddenly, and without any previous preparation, introduces a third note. JB is redeemed through human love for humanity which he learns through a mutual reconciliation with his wife. All that matters in the world, all that is permanent is man's love for man. Three possibilities actually clash with and contradict each other. The final impact of the play becomes diffuse and fuzzy.

Here is the vital significance of the play for our day. Modern man has moved out of his century-long courtship with optimistic liberalism and has come face to face with the hard reality of evil, suffering, guilt. He has learned again the importance of pity and compassion. But beyond this new humaneness, he has not moved. MacLeish, like Faulkner, the late O'Neill and Tennessee Williams, stops short of the theological implications of this world. MacLeish is fascinated by a Biblical presentation of the problem, but hesitates to accept a classic Hebrew-Christian interpretation of the material. *JB* is the predicament of modern man in his western inheritance.

CROSSWORD

ACROSS

1 He upset Puritans (8).
6 It was moated in melodrama (6).
9 Well-known stage personality seen about at night (4).
10 No state for a man, good place for a dog (4, 2, 4).
11 Eli was father to his sons (6).
12 Dora's gone into the Golden Land (8).
13 The delight in getting one's excuse reliable! (8).
15 Such wood seems very expensive for footwear (6).
17 Awkward moment to finish off a goddess (6).
19 How, in music, the part is greater than the whole (8).
21 Ha! The poet for Emma (8).
23 He tells many an appellant how it is (6).
24 Eastern people found among lions (10).
25 This bird began in Castle Square (4).
26 " O Lord—the right " (Macaulay) (6).
27 Going back to front? Yes, and no (8).



DOWN

2 Trader gets muddled, swallowing ale (3, 6).
3 She lost? You'll find her in The Winter's Tale (7).
4 Such a pull Diana has! (5)
5 Non-existent in space, but at the moment here (7).
6 Scott's " faultless monster that the world ne'er saw " (9).
7 Put her in the underground river! (7).
8 What was wrong with " L'Avare "? (5).
14 Nomads are, the weather may be (9).
16 Gerald Gould discovered his golden Oxford one (9).
18 Beachy Head fashion (7).
19 Somewhat horsy fellow, with a head for money (7).
20 Moth or 19 Across, noble (7).
22 I'm having one with Alfred, by ourselves (5).
23 The trouble in getting up a collection! (5).

Solution on page 23

ENDGAME, A MODERN MORALITY PLAY

By W. L. G. JAMES

The symbol of the miracle play behind Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* is now being recognised, and it is good to know the work of Mrs. K. Baxter in helping this recognition both in America and at the Summer School at Exeter last year. It is however curious that the even richer Christian imagery behind *Endgame*, by Beckett, has never to my knowledge been unearthed. I offer the following shortened analysis of the play in the belief that it holds the clue to an interpretation full of significance to those interested in religious drama.

The play is a modern *Everyman*, and, as every reader of morality plays would expect, the characters are symbols, although they live in their own right. Hamm, man's soul, is blind and in a chair unable even to move himself about the floor without the aid of Clov, the body, who must always stand and be doing. In names, Hamm is the " hammer ", or motive, Clovis the " clou " (nail), or action: Clov has to be taught his very words by Hamm. The parents of Hamm are kept in two dustbins, their legs cut off. Again the names give us clues: the old woman Nell is not only hideous satire on Helen, the most beautiful woman of history, but, from the etymology of the name, an albatross, Coleridge's symbol of animal nature killed by man's evil. The old man is Nagg, a reference to the Indian Naga, in whom all the spiritual forces of life are centred. An early missionary was said to have shut a Naga in a cave, as Hamm shuts Nagg in a dustbin, and there was no rain, only universal famine. Modern man has cut himself off from all the natural and spiritual forces that gave him birth.

The group appear to do little on the stage beyond establishing that all life is coming to an end, and the mood of dark despair. Yet as a still cornfield is a hive of activity to the naturalist, to the careful observer, a good deal soon begins to happen in the seemingly static play. Hamm and Clov begin, quite simply, to look around the cell, explore the situation, and feel pain at it. The first surge of hope appears.

Hamm (vehemently): To think perhaps it won't all have been for nothing.

At once we find the first sign of life, expressed with crudity as a flea (they do not recognise it as a sign of hope, and try to kill it). Even more crude, Hamm's normal functions of body return—" That 's the spirit," cries Clov delightedly. Hopes arise: Hamm will take Clov across the seas to the warm South, away from this place. But Clov cannot come. Hamm is bound to his predicament by what St. Paul called " the body of this death ". Despair returns.

But the game, which, like Everyman's, is the game of man before the face of death, is only beginning. Facing his predicament, Hamm returns to the lowest affections, that for a pet which he thinks a dog, but, like the imperfect love, is a lifeless toy, without the perfection of nature as meant by God. It will not stand on its own feet, in either senses of the phrase. Hamm therefore goes one scale higher in the scale of love, human but sensual relationships

of such love. But Hamm uses the very words of the psalmist to express the with one " Mother Pegg ", the " mother " implying also the maternal element transience of such beauty, she is as " the flower of the field ". He goes deeper to Blake, " a painter—and an engraver ", quoting his vision of the evil of material things.

We now approach the climax. An alarm clock is introduced with a ring fit " to waken the dead "; it is in fact apocalyptic, the trump ready for the last things. Everyone is caused to listen to a story. Hamm tells it in two tones, because, as elsewhere in the play, the " narrative voice " indicates the spoken action is being reenacted for the story (this will be illustrated). It is Christmas Eve and the pagan holly is going up. A man comes: we learn later he comes from Kov beyond the gulf, where there are no sinners. (Kov is Lake Kovno, beyond the Gulf of Kandalaksha, the relevant fact being that it is under the government of Archangel!) It is a bitterly cold day, and the man is making a desperate entreaty. Hamm demands what it is. The Nativity itself cannot explain it, and we are told at once that it is a brilliantly bright day, but the sun (Son), was already sinking down among the dead: this phrase uniting the idea of darkness and death in the crucifixion pleases Hamm. The man begs Hamm (Everyman) to receive his son, giving him bread. The moment of decision has come: the son has been dead three days, and now a gale breaks out, scattering the pines—the Easter morning earthquake. Frightened by fear of his own death, Hamm accepts the man, but must also accept the son (Christ with all that He implies). Both in narrative and fact the crisis has come: the story breaks off, and Hamm demands they all pray. Alas, for all its good intentions, it is not real prayer—Nagg is silenced for starting " Our Father. . . ." There is no reply, Hamm cries in despair, " He does not exist," but the true word comes from Clov, " Not yet ". At that moment of Endgame they are not ready to know Him.

From the very despair comes further illumination. Hamm turns from selfish search to realize his lack of love for others. " All those I might have helped! " he cries, and shouts to the audience " Get out of here and love one another! " All too soon he turns to the fact that human love is so often prostituted; but he is becoming prepared for the final moves of the game, those of suffering and self-abnegation. This is underlined by the sudden disappearance of pain-killing tablets. He is able to part from Clov at last, although Clov the body himself has played his part in making a venture towards release possible. " I say to myself sometimes, Clov, you must learn to suffer better than that if you want them to weary of punishing you." The body, subjected through suffering, is no longer at war with the soul. As Hamm says, " We're obliged to each other ".

And so to the final speech. Hamm, though helpless, can clean his glasses —he is beginning to see. He speaks of the night—the darkness he has cried for, thinking it would bring release, only to find it the dread night of the soul. With more compassion he speaks of the father, and the son who can know only " hunger, cold, and death to crown it all ", but he can make no definite response. Things are now being taken out of his hands, first Clov then Nagg refuse to answer, and he is glad and grateful—" Well, there we are, there I am, that is enough . . . Good, Good ". Then " to end up with," he makes his own last efforts of self-renunciation, stripping himself voluntarily of the dog, his one companion, and the whistle, the symbol of his power.

(Continued overleaf)

SUMMER SCHOOL 1959

Plans are well ahead for this holiday course in religious drama, and we hope that many of our readers are arranging their holidays to spend nine days in the city of York, from August 18th to 27th.

Our aim is to provide a thorough training in the various aspects of religious drama for a wide variety of students, whether experienced or beginners, clergy, church and youth leaders, teachers, missionaries or dramatists.

We shall bear in mind the need for presenting plays not only to our church people, but also to a much wider public. This will influence our approach and choice of plays.

We are engaging a larger number of tutors than ever before, so that students may work in smaller groups and receive more individual attention. A specialist in Movement and another in Speech Work will take daily classes. The producers will cover a wide range from theatre production to creative dramatics for youth clubs or for missions.

The value of the Study Group has been growing for several years. This time students will be engaged on the analytical study and the critical appreciation of plays. This should help dramatists as well as others.

Those choosing the Design Group may, if they wish, work on designs for set and costumes for a play of their own choice. We hope that drama groups will select a designer or potential designer to attend this most practical course, for the visual aspect of production is so often neglected.

As this is a holiday course, every afternoon is free, giving time for those who wish to explore the city and the cathedral. Excursions are arranged on one day to the moors and dales, and there may also be a theatre party. There are tennis courts in the college grounds, and country dancing every evening for those who enjoy it.

Some organisations realise the value of sending a delegate, and we hope that more will do so. Churches, clubs, dramatic societies or dioceses can select a suitable person and help him with the fees in order that he may return to take a lead in modern developments of religious drama.

As in previous years, we anticipate a spirit of friendliness and gaiety which springs from our united worship.

Leaflets are available now, and application forms will be sent on request in April. Please help us to publicise this course.

CARINA ROBINS.
Director of Training and Productions.

(*Endgame, continued*)

Nothing remains but to take out the bloodstained handkerchief he had over his face at the beginning, and replace it. Like the blood-stained handkerchief of St. Veronica (which comes into *Emueg II*, an early poem of Beckett's), it is the sign of suffering, and of compassion for suffering. "You . . . remain," says Hamm: these will remain through the end of all things.

This synopsis has but touched on the wealth of meaning and, what cannot be explained in such terms, the dramatic power, of *Endgame*. Would that a Christian playwright would write a morality play of comparable depth and modern significance, portraying what would happen if this Everyman had accepted the Child.

WORD AND ACTION

By MARGARET D. SMITH

If one wanted a single phrase to express succinctly where Christians place their trust, what they put their faith in, where their belief rests, I think one would choose the phrase " The Word of God ". It expresses the whole of God's relationship to man and man's growing understanding of God and of his necessary response to God, revealed throughout the ages and crystallised for us in the Bible—which we of course often call the " Word of God ". But the phrase also means that concrete expression of God as revealed in the Lord Jesus, so that we call *Him* the " Word of God "—the word made flesh, dwelling among us, full of grace and truth.

What is so intensely interesting is that—although the Bible contains words spoken by God (and also words spoken directly from Him by the prophets) and though Jesus often talked to people and talked both of the Father and directly from Him—yet in the final analysis both the Bible and the Son of God are not really words but Deeds; when God really wants to say something, He does something.

" In the beginning God created . . ." and one continues to ". . . man in His own image "—" And God sent forth Adam from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken ".—" And He said to Noah, ' But I will establish My covenant with thee. . . . I will not curse the ground any more; while the earth remaineth seedtime and harvest . . . shall not cease '." (Stories, perhaps, but told in the continuing image of word performed in action.) And there was Abraham, not merely with a promise but with a son, and Jacob's family taken to Egypt to escape starvation, and the Israelites freed from Egypt and led through the wilderness with pillar of cloud and pillar of fire. And so one could go on, leading the thought step by visible step to the final Word made flesh, Immanuel.

* * * * * *

" Actors " are so often speakers. Once again, how misleading the word is: " to act ", on the stage, is not necessarily " to perform actions ", for plays consist of words. Action there almost invariably must be; sometimes the action is vital, but action without words is not called a play but a mime. It is as if we feel that unless we speak we shall not be understood; time will be wasted; we shall not " get over " what we are trying to tell other people.

And yet I believe that it is true to say that everyone who attended the last two R.D.S. Summer Schools would agree that there the most telling part of the weeks were the two *mime* performances—in 1957, the dramatic presentation to drum and tambourine of ritual, decision and sacrifice, within the framework of the passion play *The Terrible Joy*; and, in 1958, the experience of war, defeat, degradation and renewed hope and faith in the gospel, told with the background of orchestral music. Who among us will easily forget the fanatical fury of the sacrifice and the blood bath; the sight of Pilate twisting the red cord in his hands, slowly and indecisively making up his mind; the monk in his brown habit showing forth the complete self-giving of the Lord Jesus, held helpless and swayed to and fro by the will of the priests and the passion of the people; the consumation of the whole in the

eternal Sacrifice? Who was not moved by the picture of daily living that turned to quarrelling and to war; the relentless onward march of the soldiers, the ruthless scene of slaughter, the terrible command of Death; the utter hopelessness of the refugees, the maimed and the sick poignantly crystallised as the blind man gropingly recognised his lover; Hope's struggle for release made possible by one act of selflessness; the final surety of strength even in weakness and of victory in the midst of reminders of defeat?

It is interesting, too, that the students were no more experienced in the art of mime than were the others who took part in the plays—indeed some of them had done no mime before, while everyone had done some acting; the tutors, though brilliant, were probably no more brilliant than those who taught the other groups. We seem, strangely, to have stumbled upon the truth that actions do speak louder than words, and that God can often speak through us in the same way in which He Himself has spoken—in the silent speech of mime.

What then shall we say?—the conclusions and the decisions must be our own. For myself, I know I shall look forward beyond all things to the presentation in mime and movement to be given at next year's Summer School.

CORRESPONDENCE

Letter to the Editor,
SIR,

Having always had a high regard for the work of Freda Collins, may I hope that she and your readers will give second thoughts to the article " The Annunciation of Pentecost " in your Christmas number?

Surely there is no need to introduce dogmas to the " little darlings " round the Crib? Jesus himself did not theorise with the children when they came to see him. Would it not be much wiser to follow his example and allow the simple, basic story of the Nativity to carry its *own* message, leaving theological interpretations until there is more maturity of thought? Otherwise the poor darlings will be so cluttered up.

The Religious Drama Society often claims to be undenominational. Yet this article in its official organ assumes that there is only one outlook on the Nativity—that of the Highest Anglican or Roman Catholic. Many of your readers, however, have very different views. Is there not also a sort of Gentile snobbery towards the other producer just because she happened to be a Jewess and had kept her balance sufficiently to produce a Christian play? If our Lord had any nationality, he was a Jew; and although I dare not speak so authoritatively on his behalf as Miss Collins does, I have a feeling he would not have expressed " horror ", but gratitude—even hope.

Yours etc.,

JOHN BOURNE.

35 Dover Street,
London, W. 1.

(Editor's note: As stated on the title page of this magazine, opinions expressed in published articles are personal, and do not necessarily state an official position of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain.)

THREE R.D.S. LECTURES IN PICCADILLY

A course of three lectures with the general title of *Breaking New Ground* will be held in the Church Hall of St. James's, Piccadilly (entry, Church Place), at 6 p.m., at fortnightly intervals in April and May. In presenting these lectures, which are an outcome of a proposal adopted at the A.G.M., the R.D.S. itself is breaking new ground by linking with the study of religious drama a study of the arts in the widest sense.

The first lecture, to be given on April 16th by the Dean of Chichester, will be very relevant to problems which arise in connection with drama and the Church since the Dean will talk of his experiences in commissioning what were then, and to some people are still, controversial works of art for St. Matthew's, Northampton, of which he was vicar.

The second lecture, on April 30th, will be by Austin Wright, the young sculptor who became famous as the designer of the Wakefield Crib. Mr. Wright's work has recently been shown in exhibitions of contemporary British art in Sweden and Brazil, so here we shall have the opportunity of hearing from the point of view of the artist, his experience in working with the Church as patron. Mr. Wright is at present doing sculpture for a church in York. He is a pupil of Henry Moore.

The third lecture, on May 14th, will be by John Fernald, Principal of the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art. He is also one of the outstanding directors of the modern theatre. He will talk on " Producing the plays of Bertolt Brecht "

The Society hopes that its members will be sufficiently interested in this new project to come in large numbers and to bring their friends; plans for future courses, which are already being discussed, will depend on the success of this first course.

STELLA MARY PEARCE.

CROSSWORD SOLUTION

ACROSS: 1, Rasputin; 6, Grange; 9, Star; 10, Down at heel; 11, Belial; 12, Eldorado; 13, Pleasure; 15, Sandal; 17; Crisis; 19, Concerto; 21, Hamilton; 23, Umpire; 24, Mongolians; 25, Rook; 26, Defend; 27, Retiring. DOWN: 2, Art dealer; 3, Perdita; 4, Tidal; 5, Nowhere; 6, Grandison; 7, Acheron; 8, Greed; 14, Unsettled; 16, Afternoon; 18, Shingle; 19, Centaur; 20, Emperor; 22, Alone; 23, Upset.

(Getting it Across, continued)

his panic. And all this Mr. Brabazon gives us in the language of life—the speech and thought of the fish and chip shop and the pub, and the well-worn clichés of the popular press. He gives it us without poetics and without pretensions and certainly without ecclesiasticism, and consequently he " gets it across " down to the youngest Teddy boy in a way seldom equalled on the stage or in the pulpit.

This is a play which we in industrial areas have been waiting for; for in breaking down the barriers of incomprehension it avoids the aesthetic barriers erected by more symbolical or stylised religious plays for an audience whose chief art-form is the realism and actuality of television. Mr. Brabazon has our thanks.

TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

The Religious Drama Society Travelling Exhibition is now complete. It consists of four panels, each 3′ 6″×2′ 0″, hinged together to make a standing screen, which sets out the aims and activities of the Religious Drama Society of Great Britain, and is intended as an eye-catching background to a display of books and R.D.S. literature.

In addition there are two deep frames, hinged together like a book, containing specimens of work by Nancy Lamplugh, including dyeing, appliqué and papier maché. Two more deep frames, also hinged, hold the original prompt copies of Dorothy Sayers' *Zeal of Thy House* with jewellery from the production by Norah Lambourne, and of James Forsyth's *Emmanuel*. There is also a group of framed costume designs including two from the original production of *Murder in the Cathedral* at Canterbury.

The Exhibition should be displayed on four tables, one at least six feet, the others at least four feet long. It is packed in three light packing-cases, can be sent by rail and could be collected in any but the very smallest car.

The Exhibition will be on view at lectures and courses organised by the Society. It will also be available, dates permitting, for the use of members who would be able to give it an adequate display.

STELLA MARY PEARCE.

THE NEW LOOK

The Society's offices have taken on a new look, and we can now welcome visitors without feeling the need to apologise. Our premises have been completely redecorated according to the designs of Miss Stella Mary Pearce, to whom we give our sincere thanks for not only preparing the scheme but also for overseeing the work.

The total amount of money available has been spent on the painting, but we still need other items to complete the prepared design. One member has been kind enough to pay for the installation of some cupboards, and another for curtains for one room. We still need another set of curtains, a carpet square, some chairs and a typewriter. With regard to the carpet we want one a dark grey (measuring thirteen feet by seven feet six inches), but we should be glad of any carpet in reasonable condition which could be dyed. The chairs we need are those suitable for committee meetings.

May we now ask members reading this to consider helping us. We should be grateful for any sum towards the completion of the work.

ADDITIONS TO THE LIBRARY

NEW PLAYS

Bible Plays for Morning Assembly. FRANK CALLISTER. (Epworth Press.) H. Casts of boys.

Twelve playlets written for Morning Prayers at a boy's school; five are from the Old Testament, seven from the New. (No fees.)

Command Journey. F. H. WISEMAN. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 5 scenes. 10 boys, 5 girls.

A morality play for a cast of children of all ages. Two boys, one nice, one nasty, set out for the Castle to enter the King's service. Their reactions to the adventures they meet on the way determine their reception when they reach the King himself. (Fee: 2/6.)

God in Great Britain: a Modern Masque. ROBERT DUCE. (Independent Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act (30 mins.). 4m., 11w., Voices, Angels, singers.

Two television commentators interview passers-by in the street on their interest in religion. The lack of response disgusts them—but it is to one of the commentators that God's call to service comes. (No fee.)

Hand to the Plough. PATIENCE FETHERSTON. (C.M.S., 1/6.) H. 2 scenes (40 mins.) 6w.

A short missionary play for women.

Scene 1 shows the staff of an African hospital, overworked and under-supplied in desperate need of another assistant. Scene 2 shows a girl who gave up a career as a medical missionary to stay with her possessive mother, once more faced with the challenge to " leave all and follow Him ". (No fee.)

I Have Spoken to My Children. DARIUS LEANDER SWANN. (Friendship Press, Inc., U.S.A.) H. 1 act. 3m., 4w., Verse Chorus.

An American play for an all-coloured cast.

A negro family in a State where racial feeling runs high long to give up the unequal struggle and move to a more tolerant neighbourhood. Their mother begs them to stay and face the problem, with faith in God's purpose for white and black. (No fee.)

Kingdoms Ablaze. T. F. FENTON and P. M. WEBB. (M.M.S., 2/–.) H. Cont. action (approx. 80 mins.). Large cast.

The text of the Pageant of Women's Work (the women's missionary organisation of the Methodist Church), given at the Albert Hall in May, 1958. Both this version and an arrangement for smaller-scale stage productions are given. (No fee.)

Our Lady's Tumbler. IRENE HALL. (Typescript.) H. Cont. action. 8m., 2w., Monks. Produced on B.B.C. television at Easter, 1956.

A new version in free-verse of the legend of the *Jongleur de Notre Dame*, here represented as Alouette, minstrel and jester to the King of France. (Fee: apply author, c/o R.D.S.)

The Outer Courts. VERA I. ARLETT. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 1 act. 1m., 3 Angels, children, Holy Family tableau.

A fantasy for Christmas. A Guardian Angel brings his first assignment safely to the Outer Courts of Heaven, the place of the Holy Innocents, where the wonder of childhood can be recaptured. (Fee: 2/6.)

The Pleasure of Your Company. P. N. WEBB. (M.M.S., 1/–.) 10w. A dramatised service for Methodist Women's Work. (No fee.)

The Road to Heaven. JOHN FERGUSON. (Epworth Press, 1/6.) H. 1 act (5 scenes). Large cast of children.

Scenes illustrating a new version of the song, " Oh you'll never go to Heaven . . ." (Fee: 2/6.)

This is Your Life. P. M. WEBB. (M.M.S., 6d.) H. 1 act (40 mins.). 1 adult, 4–5 boys, 4–5 girls, choir. (No fee.)

Treasures for the King. WILFRED CHALLENOR. (Epworth Press, 9d.) H. 1 scene. 7m., 1f., Angel, 1 boy, 1 girl, 3 opt. children.
A Nativity scene for Sunday Schools, mainly in mime and music. (Fee: 2/6.)

REFERENCE LIBRARY

The Boy David. J. M. BARRIE. Film Strip. (Educational Productions, Ltd., 25/–.)
Twenty-seven frames, showing scenes from the Birmingham Repertory Theatre production (March, 1953). The accompanying notes give extracts from the script.

Making Stage Costumes for Amateurs. A. V. WHITE. (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 10/6.)
A short and very simple handbook, with some diagrams and basic patterns.

The Theatre. H. and R. LEACROFT. (Methuen, 10/6.)
A well-produced survey of theatres past and present, with some excellent cross-section drawings of theatre buildings.

Your Book of Acting. KENNETH NUTTALL. (Faber, 8/6.)
A simple book for older children, designed to stimulate serious interest in acting. The opening chapters on mime are good, if sketchy, but those on lighting, costumes, etc., are quite inadequate for a child sufficiently interested in drama to read the book at all. For example, only eight pages of large print cover *How to Produce a Play*.

SPECIAL NOTES

The Trial of Jimmy Brown. JAMES BRABAZON. (Typescript.) H. Cont. act. 8m., 2w.
Jimmy Brown ran for a bus, and started the action that leads to thrombosis.

At the bus stop, Jimmy meets a Stranger, who tells him that he will die at 6 p.m. precisely, and that he has only ten hours in which to get ready. Terrified and bewildered, Jimmy sets out to obtain references for the next world. He visits the Editor of the *Daily Splash* (the People's Friend), who consoles him with bright nothings and hastily passes him on to a Doctor. The Doctor, remarking cheerfully that " Death's the one thing I can't cure ", passes him on to a Parson, who does his best but cannot make himself understood. Jimmy goes to his mates, who desert him in alarm.

At home with his wife, and visited by the anxious Parson, Jimmy realises fully how unfit for death he is. Facing what he feels to be an unfair Judgement on a muddled but well-meaning life, he accuses the God who has asked the impossible.

Six o'clock strikes, and Jimmy dies.

In eternity, Jimmy begins to grasp the fact of his own sinfulness, and that his few good deeds were the action of God in him. To the first signs of " the outermost edge of the Presence of God " he responds with wonder, and sets out with the Stranger on the long and painful journey towards Him.

This contemporary *Everyman* is written in a lively and forceful modern idiom, and its satire is both apt and very funny. Though the author claims that it is " not for the sophisticated ", Jimmy Brown's views on life touch a chord in most people's hearts.

The play's chief difficulty is the great weight that is thrown on what happens to Jimmy *after* death. Up to that point, the story is so convincing that we are predisposed to accept the conclusion as " gospel ". What happens to us, and what further choices we can make after death are simply not known, and the dangers of writing as if we *know* are obvious. In fantasy this need not matter (cf. *Carousel* and other star-and-harp epics), but in an evangelistic play it is a serious risk.

However, this is not to disparage an exciting and worth-while experiment in the field of religious drama where experiment is most needed. (Fee: £1 1s.; U.S.A.. $15.)

B. J.

(See also the review of the production at Billingham-on-Tees in " Far and Wide ".)

FAR AND WIDE

Billingham, Co. Durham

Three months of hard preparations justified themselves in a packed Stockton Parish Church Hall, when St. Aidan's Players, Billingham, began what they hope will be a busy tour of Tees-side with *The Trial of Jimmy Brown*, James Brabazon's experimental religious play which deals with the world of beer, bus stops and the British working man.

The play will perhaps prove to be Tees-side's most unusual theatrical offering of the season. Convincingly produced by Miss Pamela Keily, adviser to the committee for religious drama in the Northern Province, it will be given " without financial obligation " in any church hall where it is asked for. Local vicars should lose no time in snapping their fingers for this service, since the play is one that could do a power of good. There is no moralising, no sermonising, no sentimentality. Instead of bearded sages with their glib burblings of faith, hope and charity, there are recognisable people with the idiomatic talk of to-day's world. And the whole thing is wildly funny.

The problem itself is one you could hear in any pub any day. Is it enough for salvation for a man to be a decent, ordinary sort of a chap, never going out of his way to harm anyone, but never doing a great deal of good at the same time? Jimmy Brown knows he is to die in a few hours. He feels he must gather references for the next world. But where?

The play, really made up of a series of little sketches, does not make big demands on the players. Still, it was pleasing to see the whole cast acquitting itself so consistently well. The production team, too, did a skilful job in presenting the play on a small stage cluttered with two pianos. Perhaps Jimmy couldn't quite make the harp grade after all.

. . . The Synthonia Players' *Studio Night*, in the I.C.I. Theatre, Billingham, made an exciting and rewarding theatrical evening.

. . . The widowed mother in Fry's *Boy with a Cart* is no suburban shrew. Played with touching dignity, she is vigorously independent, but lets her son carry her in his cart until he can start his life work of building a church. The " boy " was properly dedicated and exultant, and there were several more fine pieces of individual acting.

The guest producer, Pamela Keily, showed a lively imagination, especially in her treatment of the chorus, which proved itself fit to be trusted with Fry's superb imagery.

(*Both extracts by permission from the Middlesbrough " Evening Gazette ".*)

H. M.

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Bristol, Gloucester and Somerset Branch

Drama Festival, November, 1959.

As zero hour grew nearer most of the Committee began to meditate on the shades of difference between hope, courage, and foolhardiness in attempting to organise a two-night Festival of Religious Drama exactly a year after the inauguration of the Branch, with nothing in the kitty to cover financial loss. There were other difficulties, of course: some teams who had given provisional promises had to drop out, and the Hon. Secretary had a worrying time finding substitutes to make a full programme. In the outcome, the Festival proved an act of faith. There was even a small credit balance, due to the help of friends, in particular to the generosity of the Council of the Bristol Central Y.M.C.A. who tempered their theatre's hiring fee lest the lamb should be too closely shorn, and to the Bristol S.P.C.K. who helped our publicity by a window display.

Six Groups presented plays: The St. Giles Players, Bristol; Oldfield Park Methodist Youth Club, Bath, Holy Trinity Youth Fellowship, Bath; the Long Ashton Church Group; the St. Matthew's Players, Bristol; and the Downend Religious Drama Group, Bristol. The work showed a long range of ability, and not the least of the benefits of the Festival was the thorough but tactful criticism and help given by the adjudicator: both experienced and less advanced groups must have learned a great deal from her public adjudication and the private discussions which followed.

One of the difficulties of the less experienced groups would seem to be the choice of play, and it is evident that some groups would benefit from help in this direction. The Committee has also considered whether, on future occasions, some preliminary choice of teams might be advisable to ensure, for the benefit of the audience, a more uniform

standard of ability. The less experienced groups would then have an opportunity of help, given privately, at their own performances, and under their normal conditions. Whatever may finally be decided about this, the Festival certainly gave the Committee a chance to find out how Groups could best benefit from the Branch's future activities.

We were pleased to welcome as a guest at the Festival the Rev. H. Phillips, of the Salisbury Diocesan Fellowship of Religious Drama, though a little embarrassed by his avowed reason for coming: to see how a Festival is run! But at least we ourselves discovered that a Festival can be run on willing co-operation from friends of the R.D.S., from enthusiasm, hard work, and sincerity of intention on the part of the organisers and of the Groups who offer productions. Added to this, came the goodwill of a much larger audience than we had dared to hope for at a first effort of so young a Branch.

N. R.

* * *

Bucklers Mead Drama Group

This school group has now been in existence for just over a year. Membership has increased from 30 to 58; the ages of the members range from 11 to 14 years.

Productions have included the following: Christmas, 1957, *The Story of Christmas in Mime*, together with a short original mime; July, 1957, *Pandora's Box* and *Just Another Day*, a gay composition in mime, music and song created by the children and performed out of doors for the official opening of the school; Christmas, 1958, *Christmas In The Market Place* and a short dance drama. The dance drama was evolved by a thirteen-year-old who had learned the technique from Mr. Alan Garrard at the R.D.S. Summer School at Exeter: 33 boys and girls took part in the mime, and the entire direction, including costume and lighting, was undertaken by the same young lady.

Other activities have included a one day " school " with Mr. Alan Garrard as tutor, which was a tremendous success; a service during Holy Week with music, poetry readings and a dramatised reading of a part of *Christ in the Concrete City* and a visit by some members to a production of *The River Line* by the London Theatre Company.

N. J. N.

Cambridge Hopping Mission

World in Hand, by Marcus Bennett.

We acted this play on the Cambridge Hopping Mission in September, 1958. It is about a family of ordinary people; the curtain goes up at breakfast time to reveal early morning bickering and family strife; the trouble is that the father, and the teenage son and daughter, Ted and Brenda, have all been going off on their own tacks, father to the pub, the youngsters to the dance, while mum, the only one left at home, is also the only one to realise how disunified the family has become. These amusing and realistic family scenes reoccur in the second scene, when the situation is driven home, and Ted and Brenda, after rushing down their teas, bolt off, the one to the pictures, the other to the dance, leaving mum alone and brooding. By the time ten o'clock arrives (in the third scene) she is reading the dismal news column. Suddenly there is a sound of voices and laughter and Ted and Brenda appear, accompanied by their respective girl and boy friends, and, believe it or not, the curate. Mum, amazed but delighted that at last they have brought their friends home " to make it all cosy ", asks how they all met. It turns out that the girl and boy friends, both being members of the local church youth club, have taken Ted and Brenda to a church dance that evening where they all met and got to know the curate. The curate is then able to tell them something about God, Our Lord and the church, and later father appears, a little drunk, but very sociable. He recognises the curate because they have played darts together at the pub. At last the family feels itself again, and they all get on much better with each other under the impetus of their new friends. Finally a wounded sparrow, which the girl friend had found in the road, " perks up ", and the play ends on the note of " not one sparrow falls to the ground without the Father in heaven knowing all about it ". In between scenes was played " He 's got the whole world in his hand " on a violin, and, at the end, the whole cast sang it; this led naturally into a jiving session and general amusement.

The play went down well. It was acted five times, each time in the open air on a grass common with no real stage; once it was rained off about three-quarters of the way through. The family scenes were very well received; a gang of " mums " in our audience sat cheering each time " mum " scored a

point, and both children and adults seemed to enter into the play, and remembered a great deal about it afterwards. The religious message came across well, and, though it would not mean so much to some, seemed to interest many; some people even asked questions about it later.

The useful points that seem to emerge from this production are three. First, the down-to-earth, unforced personal relationships of the characters aroused interest and amusement and gave a sense of genuineness. Secondly, the introduction of the sparrow was highly successful, gaining the children's interest and leading naturally to ideas of the value of the humblest creatures before God. Thirdly, the music between scenes and the singing and dancing at the end of the play, followed by cocoa, more songs and dances, got rid of any "churchiness" and made a very pleasant evening from the point of view of sheer entertainment; and, perhaps, connected in our audience's minds the idea of religion with the idea of joy. It seemed to all of us that here was a type of medium really capable, and in this play really effective, of bringing Christianity into contact with the culture of most Englishmen to-day, and in that way touching the people who make up that culture.

* * *

London, E.C. 1

The Dragon and the Dove by James Bridie, at the Church of the Holy Redeemer.

This recently created group has many problems to overcome. Not the least is the inevitable Church Hall stage, intended for chairmen of meetings and superintendents of Sunday Schools, reasonably high, partly recessed in the back wall of the hall, and well lit—for these purposes—by two pairs of overhead lights and a pair of small floods. These advantages, however, are not of much use to a dramatic production; the small stage was further crowded by the necessity for having centrally-placed furniture, and there can be no subtlety about vertical lighting from 100 watt pearl bulbs. Accoustics appeared to be reasonable and I heard no one complain that they could not hear. A further disadvantage, where this play was concerned, was the very youth of the company, for at least three of the actors were trying to portray characters two and three times their own age; evidences of age in their movements were hampered by lack of make-up, and greyed hair will do nothing to compensate for an abundance of undisguised youthful contours.

But those are the disadvantages, the problems, the things to be grappled with and overcome. And I feel that they will be overcome. For there was evidence enough of the sincerity and goodwill of the players, of the devotion to their producer, and of the immense amount of work that they had obviously willingly put into this play. Even the two unrewarding parts of the Abbot and the Deaconess were given the wholehearted attention of the actors, and the pertness of the young lay brother lifted their smooth scenes with just sufficient levity. Inevitably, the scenes which everyone—actors and audience alike—enjoyed most was the one where Abraham tries on the cavalry officer's uniform (*and* the swearwords which he and Ephraim felt went with the character), and the one in the inn, with a suitably tattered and frousty landlady and a belligerent and bloodthirsty knave.

The settings, of the desert mountains and the Inn of the Three Kittens, were, as one would expect from Stella Mary Pearce, brilliant, fascinating and lovely; unfortunately they were too sophisticated for this particular production, and tended to stand out too strikingly in contrast.

As I said, the play was greatly enjoyed. I fancy, however, that it was not believed, because the cast themselves did not believe it. (Which is different from believing *in* it.) It is unfortunately true —in all contexts—that unless the word is believed by the speaker, it is not believed by the hearer, and this company have to learn that every mood, emotion, action and word must be thought (there on the stage as well as thought *out* beforehand) if the production is to carry the weight of reality. This may seem critical in the extreme, but I say it because I believe that these young people are willing to be and capable of being a channel of the Truth, through the means of religious drama, and to do that they must be true in the technical as well as the spiritual sense.

M. D. S.

* * *

Melbourne, Australia

Christ in the Concrete City (from a letter):

. . . The presentation I saw was for the Methodist Youth Monthly Rally.

There were, I estimate, between 800 to 1,000 there and in the whole of my experience I have never heard an audience make less noise. You could have heard the proverbial pin drop throughout the whole of the play. I consider it was well written, well produced and well acted. The props were four boxes, the dresses were the cloaks and there were four young fellows and two women who made up the whole company.

On Saturday afternoon they played it in the Geelong Gaol. Geelong is the largest town in Victoria outside of Melbourne, and is about 45 miles away.

My reaction to the play was that it was not being shown to people who were regular playgoers. Of course those young people that saw it will surely take something from it into the world, but they are such a drop in the ocean. . . .

C. S.

* * *

Muswell Hill (Tetherdown), London,N.10

In celebration of the festival of Christmas, 1958, the Congregational Church ventured outside its usual sphere of drama and with some trepidation presented the one-act opera *Amahl and the Night Visitors* by Gian-Carlo Menotti. This opera tells of a crippled boy and his mother who are visited by the three Kings bearing their gifts on the way to seek the Holy Child, and of the miracle which cures the boy when he offers his crutch, the thing upon which he is most dependent, as a gift for the Child. The music, while having a modern flavour, is evocative and appealing and this little opera proved an excellent choice for Christmas, holding the attention of adults and children alike.

Realizing the ambitious nature of such a production everyone concerned took great care in all the preparations and the result was a highly finished presentation. The various tasks of designing and executing the scenery, assembling the costumes and preparing the properties were assigned to different individuals and co-ordinated by the producer and stage manager in a way that was almost too theoretical to be true!

The church organist was responsible for the music and ably conducted his singers whom he chose mainly from the church choir. For the actual performances he obtained the services of a small group of musicians to form a chamber orchestra. The part of Amahl was sung by a twelve-year-old, who completely captured the spirit of this mischievous, lovable boy.

The Producer strove for simplicity of movement and grouping, avoiding great detail which would have been out of place in such a short work. The singers' movements were to some extent governed by the need for them to be able to see the conductor and project their voices direct into the auditorium. However, the balance between the drama and the music was well maintained and at no time did they conflict, with the above reservation, but the action arose naturally out of the music. The production was also interesting in that none of the characters entered from the stage, but all came in from various parts of the hall.

Amahl and the Night Visitors must be one of the few operas within the range of an amateur group, but its inherent difficulties must be faced at the outset if success is to be achieved. There is little doubt that those who saw the opera at Tetherdown will long remember its lovely setting, its spirited acting and its beautiful music, and give thanks for such a highly polished performance.

J. R. S.

* * *

Redhill, Surrey

In November, December and January, 1958–59, the Redhill Congregational Dramatic Society gave three performances of *The Runaway Slave* by Freda Collins. Each took the place of the sermon at an evening service. The first was at the Redhill Congregational Church, the second at the Nutfield Parish Church, and the third at the Walton-on-the-Hill Congregational Church. The play is based on the story of Philemon and Onesimus and actually includes the delivery of St. Paul's Epistle by Onesimus. It is a moving presentation of the story, and shows well the effect of the Faith upon two such contrasting types as the patrician and the slave. Philemon's son, Archippus, remains critical of Christianity, though shaken in the end by what he sees of its transforming power. The productions were effective and much appreciated by the three churches.

* * *

Runyararo Mission, S. Rhodesia

(Extracts from a letter):

". . . I think you will like to know what a very great success our all-African cast have had with their performance of

(part of) *The Rock*, by T. S. Eliot centring round a mime of Church building, with a final procession of craftsmen's offerings on the altar. It was done as an Act of Thanksgiving for the completion of the great new church of St. Michael, Harari, finally consecrated on October 10th in the presence of thousands of Africans from far and near. . . . The audience were quite astounded at such an understanding exposition of Eliot's verse and thought by these young players (teachers, students and workmen).

" The ' motto ' of the play, ' A Church for us all, and work for us all, and God's world for us all, even unto this last ', was chanted quite spontaneously at rehearsal as they moved a heavy piece of stage property—a typically African occupational song!

Since doing *The Rock*, I have been to the Mission of Christ the King at Daramambe to put on their Christmas play. . . . The novel feature was that we played the scenes in different spots on the Mission to which the audience processed, singing Christmas hymns in Shona, for example, a scene in which Mary is seen filling her pot with water, and Gabriel runs down the road to greet her, while Narrators stand on the low bridge above, is linked with the Visitation by our following Our Lady as she goes up the lane, her basket on her head. The Shepherds had a real fire below sloping rocks down which ran the Angelic Host and up again to an exit that really looked as if they disappeared into heaven, against the sun glinting on their haloes.

To many who are cut off from the Christmas services, I think the meaning of Incarnation really came home. One boy said he liked the Inn scene best (not the most decorative) as it ' made it all so real '."

A. M. SANDER.

STRASBOURG 1960

We are arranging for an International Conference of Religious Drama and a Festival of Plays to take place in Strasbourg, France, from July 4th to 12th, 1960. Delegates and touring companies of all denominations will be invited from many parts of the world. The public will be invited to all open sessions of the Conference, and to the plays which will be presented in English, French and German, in theatres, halls, churches and out of doors.

Realising that many of our members will want to visit Strasbourg for this occasion, as well as going to Oberammagau for the Passion Play, we are arranging a twelve-day tour in association with INTERCHURCH TRAVEL, from July 1st to 12th. The first week-end is at Oberammagau, followed by eight days at Strasbourg. Approximate price, including travel, play and conference tickets, by rail: £43 or $130. By air: £49 or $150.

Special arrangements are being made for parties from the United States, and I-C.T. are prepared to organise further European travel for overseas visitors.

Our members received particulars of this tour in January with a tear-off slip to be returned. Those who replied have already received further details, but there is still time for others to write in, and the slip does not commit you in any way. So if you think you would like to join the tour please write at once, enclosing a stamped addressed foolscap envelope, as accommodation has to be booked now.

CARINA ROBINS.

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